



The Office of Councilmember
Raul A. Campillo

Proudly serving San Diego's 7th District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 27, 2023

Contact: Crane Friedman | cfriedman@sandiego.gov | 619-629-7342

Providers, First Responders, Councilmembers, and Experts Detail Need for More Behavioral Health Beds in San Diego

***At Special Economic Development and Intergovernmental Relations (EDIR) Committee,
Councilmember Campillo Fosters Interagency Collaboration to Address Behavioral Health
Crisis***

SAN DIEGO — As Chair of the Economic Development And Intergovernmental Relations (EDIR) Committee, Councilmember Raul Campillo called a special meeting today to bring together experts, leaders, and providers to discuss the drastic need for more behavioral health beds in San Diego and coordinate a regional response to the issue.

“What’s clear listening to advocates, experts, and first responders is that the state of our behavioral health system in San Diego is unacceptable,” said Councilmember Raul Campillo. **“I called today’s special meeting to get to the bottom of why our behavioral health bed shortage is as bad as it is, what we need to do to make more progress, and how to do it faster than we have been. Addressing our behavioral health bed shortage will help us combat homelessness, reduce the strain on our first responders, and tackle some of our region’s biggest challenges.”**

At the meeting, first responders, behavioral health providers, housing and homelessness experts, and hospital representatives discussed the problem in detail from each of their perspectives. During their presentations, experts told the story through eye-catching statistics such as:

- In order to have an “optimal” behavioral health system, various types of behavioral health services would need to increase capacity by:
 - Community-Based Care - 142%
 - Subacute Services - 64%
 - Community Crisis Diversion - 359%
 - All – 155%
- In FY22 at Sharp Mesa Vista Behavioral Health Hospital, Medi-Cal subscribers were readmitted at double (9.60%) the rate of commercial insurance subscribers (4.80%).
- In FY23, San Diego first responders received 31,604 unique calls for EMS response with psychiatric/behavioral concerns or substance use disorder concerns, resulting in an estimated 53,726 hours of Fire Department Hours.

Presenters also spoke to the impact that the behavioral health shortage has on all San Diegans, affecting issues ranging from homelessness to EMS response times and hospital wait times, due to the increased strain on resources.

“EMS first responders deal with complicated mental health and addiction crises every single day on the job,” said Jodie Pierce, Deputy San Diego Fire Department Chief for Emergency Medical Services. “The dire lack of behavioral health beds makes our already-challenging work even more difficult. I commend Councilmember Campillo for shining a light on this important issue, and I hope that City and County leaders can collaborate to ensure that behavioral health bed needs are met.”

“The extreme lack of behavioral health options – particularly for patients with Medi-Cal coverage – must be met by urgent action from our local leaders,” said Christiana Paul, MFT, Vice President of the Continuum of Care at Sharp Mesa Vista Hospital, the largest provider of inpatient and outpatient behavioral health services in San Diego. “All San Diegans – not just those suffering from behavioral health emergencies -- are affected by this lack of services because it increases wait times for everyone seeking care at our hospitals. Additional behavioral health beds, more robust care networks and expanded Medi-Cal post-acute care options are critical for the safety and wellbeing of all San Diegans.”

“Addressing the homelessness crisis requires a comprehensive approach that relies on a variety of resources capable of helping to resolve each household’s unique circumstances. Behavioral health services are one element of that approach. They are essential resources for households with a higher level of need. Expanding behavioral health services to provide easier access is crucial for these households to transition to longer-term, stable housing,” San Diego Housing Commission Interim President & CEO Jeff Davis said.

Wednesday’s special ED&IR meeting comes in the context of larger trends surrounding behavioral health in California. Tomorrow, Councilmember Campillo will join Mayor Gloria, the United Nurses Association of California, and other elected leaders in a rally in support of [SB 43 \(Eggeman\)](#), a law that would give police and other authorities more leeway to use involuntary treatment for those with extreme mental illness. [Governor Gavin Newsom has also championed bills like SB 326 and AB 531](#) that would reform the Mental Health Services Act and use a \$4.68 billion bond to fund behavioral health beds and supportive housing units.

Though the issue of behavioral health has traditionally been handled at the County level rather than by the City of San Diego, Councilmember Campillo used his role as the Chair of the Economic Development & Intergovernmental Relations Committee to draw attention to the issue. Moving forward, Councilmember Campillo will continue to advocate for more action on behavioral health from the position of Chair of the ED&IR Committee, including in upcoming ED&IR meetings in October and the remainder of 2023.

About Councilmember Raul A. Campillo

Councilmember Raul A. Campillo proudly represents the Seventh Council District of the City of San Diego and serves as the Chair of the Economic Development & Intergovernmental Relations Committee.

###